

NDI QUARTERLY REPORT: April 1 to June 30, 2001

ARMENIA

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I. SUMMARY

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) submits this quarterly report for activities conducted in Armenia from April 1 to June 30, 2001. During this period, NDI conducted programs with political parties and its Armenian civic partner, It's Your Choice (IYC). NDI's work with democratic political parties mainly focused on addressing internal party development and long-term planning while continuing to develop party programs to increase citizen participation in political processes. In the civic sector, NDI assisted It's Your Choice in developing its civic education and citizen participation programs in communities across Armenia. IYC also began a cooperative agreement with NDI on June 1.

Some activities with political and civic groups conducted in June were related to a program to assist in amending the Electoral Code funded by a CEPPS grant (Cooperative Agreement No. AEP-5468-A-00-5038-00). A report on these activities has been sent separately.

NDI's programs correspond to USAID/Armenia's strategic objective 2.1, "More transparent, accountable, and responsive democratic governance," and the intermediate results "Increased citizen participation in policy development oversight in government" and "Citizens understand and act upon their rights and responsibilities."

II. BACKGROUND

Since 1991, Armenia has faced difficult challenges to independent statehood. Poorly designed economic policies have led to a deterioration of living standards. Numerous elections marred by serious fraud and violations have undermined the legitimacy of elected officials and of the government itself.

Armenia's democratic political parties have struggled in recent years over whether to try to advance limited reform in cooperation with the executive branch or to work in opposition to an ever more authoritarian government. This fundamental issue faced by many emerging democracies has resulted in a series of splits and realignments of political forces in Armenia in recent months. Some parties have complained that the government has used its influence to promote and exploit these divisions and splits as part of a divide and rule philosophy.

In recent years, NDI has sought to increase nationwide citizen participation in political parties and political processes at the grassroots level. NDI's aim is to promote stable, sustainable, nationwide, and democratic political parties. To do this, NDI has helped parties gather

information on local issues, devise ways for solving these issues at the community level, and then move these questions along to the national stage.

In terms of future elections, democratic political and civic groups continue to push for real reform. In November 2000, the President and all political parties in the parliament reached agreement on an amendment to the election law to increase the number of parliamentary seats decided by proportional voting from 56 to 94 out of 131. NDI's civic partner, It's Your Choice, played a leading role in writing the amendment. With CEPPS funds, NDI and IYC have continued to work toward amending the Electoral Code and succeeded in building political consensus around amendments to provide for a more even playing field for future elections.

III. PREVIOUS NDI ACTIVITIES

NDI established an office in Armenia in 1995 to conduct a wide range of USAID-funded political party development and civic organizing programs. Since 1995, NDI has assisted over a dozen democratic political parties and blocs to contest and monitor elections, and build more democratic and effective political organizations. In recent years, NDI has focused its assistance on the Armenian People's Party (APP), the Self-Determination Union (SDU), and the National Democratic Union (NDU), but also has offered and will continue to offer assistance to the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), smaller democratic parties and evolving coalitions. NDI has trained activists within each party to assist NDI in conducting training sessions for their party members and assist regional party chapters in interacting with citizens.

In 1996, NDI worked to establish "It's Your Choice", a coalition of NGOs which provided voter education and recruited and trained over 3,000 election monitors for the 1996 polls. After the 1996 elections, NDI worked with It's Your Choice to build a sustainable organization with organizational chapters, staff and over 4,000 volunteers across the country. In addition, NDI worked with IYC to professionalize its election programs while expanding post-election programming dramatically to include the organization of town hall meetings, citizen advisory committees (CACs), national and regional advocacy campaigns, and civic education through mock election programs in all 11 districts of Armenia, including Yerevan. As a result of NDI's work, IYC has become the largest volunteer civic organization in Armenia and the nation's leading authority on elections and community development.

IV. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Civic programming

Objectives

During this period, NDI's civic programming sought to:

- Increase citizen awareness, access to information, and participation in political processes through town hall meetings, citizen advisory committees, public hearings, mock elections, advocacy campaigns and election monitoring

- Develop IYC's capacity to conduct independently civic education, citizen participation and civic advocacy programs
- Promote IYC's capacity for organizational development and management

Activities

With assistance from NDI, It's Your Choice has been developing and implementing an active citizen participation program across the country. This program provides citizens with an opportunity to discuss and prioritize community issues and learn about local government functions. IYC forums promote the idea that community action is the way to solve civic problems. To sustain IYC's citizen participation work at the local level, IYC has helped local government officials and citizens form citizen advisory committees (CAC). Advisory committee members organize, plan and collectively solicit resources to solve problems identified through IYC town hall meetings. In cases where a community problem requires resources or decisions from higher levels of government, citizen advisory committees frequently organize advocacy campaigns (petitions, letter writing campaigns, etc.) to make their voices heard.

During this quarter, IYC continued its regular program of two town hall meetings per month in each of the 10 regional districts of Armenia. IYC conducted a total of 60 town hall meetings across the country with a total of more than 4,000 participants. IYC also continued to support the development of over 100 citizen advisory committees that the organization has founded over the past years. IYC held multiple meetings with citizen advisory committees across the country during this quarter and created twelve new advisory committees.

For example, in mid-April, NDI observed two town hall meetings in Syunik district that were organized and advertised by IYC volunteers without assistance from IYC staff. One hundred twenty community members from Arajadzor and Okhtar villages participated in the meetings, which addressed topics as irrigation and potable water, renovation of cultural centers, land use, and taxes. Through lobbying the district government and applying to various international organizations for financial assistance, the local CAC helped the farmers of the Arajadzor and Geghanush villages receive the necessary amount of seeds in time for planting.

Afterwards, NDI/Armenia met with Angela Makeyan, IYC's Syunik district coordinator, to discuss how to better track programs and the progress of each citizen advisory committee (CAC). Ms. Makeyan felt that an improved reporting system would allow IYC to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the citizen participation program and to analyze its impact more accurately. Based on this discussion, NDI and IYC are working further on the tracking and evaluation of programs.

In Vayots Dzor district, IYC helped citizens organize community renovations and the reconstruction of ruined roads in the town of Karmrashen. Through an IYC program in Yeghegis village, citizens appointed a community leader to arrange the sale of farming products. During town hall meetings in Hermon and Gomk villages, participants discussed potential ways to increase citizen participation in local government. In addition, advisory committees in Vayots Dzor helped resolve problems of delays in salary and pension payments and the reconstruction of ruined buildings in the district.

In May, NDI/Armenia observed an IYC town hall meeting in Lori district. During the meeting, local officials presented for the first time a community budget proposal to community residents. Officials made adjustments to the budget in order to satisfy the demands of the citizens.

Community members in Tavush district enlisted the support of IYC in solving the problems of ruined pipelines, lack of potable water, and reconstruction of the main road in Ditavan village. IYC helped the community form an advisory committee to address those issues. The local radio channel broadcasted news about IYC's efforts in Tavush district.

In Kotayk district, an IYC advisory committee invited a representative of the national government water management department to meet with the residents of Mrgashen village to discuss irrigation systems and water supplies in the area. Both issues have been successfully settled through IYC mediation. Another advisory committee in the district appealed to a local court regarding the fair distribution of property tax revenue to community members in Mayakovsky.

On May 26, IYC held its first Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) conference. Ten IYC regional coordinators and forty CAC representatives attended the conference in Yerevan. IYC used the meeting to encourage the CAC leaders to share with us their past and recent successes. Participants discussed their accomplishments in implementing community development projects, conducting training activities, and fundraising. These included cleaning projects in communities and large endeavors like one in Ararat district in which a CAC raised over 11 million drams (US \$20,000) to purchase and distribute fertilizer to community farmers. In addition, CAC leaders used this opportunity to discuss "lessons learned", including common obstacles faced by CACs across the country and different approaches used to overcome them.

During the conference, IYC President Harout Hambartsumian emphasized the need for IYC to develop fundraising initiatives as a way to make the organization more self-sustaining. NDI/Armenia had been helping IYC develop fundraising efforts through organizational raffles and paid advertising in the IYC newsletter. However, IYC regional leaders stressed the need to raise funds to support the growing number of CACs and community development projects as well. Mr. Hambartsumian noted that IYC has and will continue to pursue funding for community projects with international donors referred to IYC by USAID, but stressed the need to better utilize volunteer resources, donated materials, and small amounts of cash from local community members.

NDI and IYC continued to develop a mock election program that is designed to teach first-time voters throughout the country how to participate in and monitor the election process as well as encourage them to exercise their right to vote. In the past three months, IYC conducted mock election seminars in the districts of Ararat, Shirak, Kotayk, Lori, Tavush, and Vayots Dzor. Representatives of regional electoral committees also attended some of the seminars. IYC regional coordinators provided seminar participants with background information on the voting and counting procedures specified in the new electoral code. Local TV and radio stations recorded IYC seminars and broadcasted them throughout the nation. For example, IYC held two

workshops for secondary school students in the city of Abovian (Kotayk district) that were broadcast live by the local TV channel, Lanj.

NDI continues to assist IYC in the development of its board of directors and its financial management systems. During this quarter, NDI worked with It's Your Choice to finalize its accounting systems and put into place a cooperative agreement with NDI.

Political party programming

Over the past couple of month, Armenia's major political parties have been experiencing internal divisions over the level of party cooperation with the government. Several of NDI's political partners held political party conferences that turned members' attentions to strategic planning and long-term party objectives. The results were uneven. A few parties split; a few drew closer together and stronger.

During the annual conference of the National Democratic Union (NDU), party leaders disagreed over the future level of party cooperation with the government. As a result, two groups left the party to form organizations called the National Democratic Party and the National Democratic Alliance. The two and the remaining but smaller NDU will pursue different approaches to the government in the year ahead, but all three parties have told NDI that they would cooperate on many issues, including NDI training, and expected to jointly contest the municipal elections in 2002. Also, debates within the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) led to the formation of a new opposition "Republic Party".

Objectives

During this period, NDI's political party programs sought to:

- Help parties assess their internal capacity and, from this analysis, develop strategies to strengthen their organizations at the national and regional levels
- Assist national, regional and local party chapters to strengthen citizens' political awareness and participation in political processes at all levels

Activities

Much of NDI's political party work during this quarter focused on gaining the participation of political leaders in two roundtable discussion to amend the Electoral Code, and soliciting their written and verbal recommendations for draft amendments. This program, conducted separately with CEPPS funding, seeks to persuade members of parliament to amend the Electoral Code so that it meets international standards for the municipal elections in 2002. Such amendments are a top priority of Armenian political parties given the repeated fraudulent elections of the past six years. The first two programs, conducted in early June, sought to build broad political consensus among party leaders and members of parliament on several key electoral issues. A report on this CEPPS program activity has been sent separately.

During this quarter, NDI met frequently with representatives of its political partners to establish new and strengthen old relationships, and determine parties' need for and interest in NDI's training. In mid-June, NDI attended the party conferences of the three of its partners: National Democratic Party (NDP), the Self-Determination Union, and the Armenian Peoples Party (APP). Participants in the three conferences discussed the fundamental issues of party development and strategic planning. NDI also provided consultations and technical assistance during this critical phase of party development to ensure a smooth transition for the parties and keep the regional party programming and communications active.

In mid-May, NDI/Armenia conducted a second round of regional trainings for several NDU chapters. The first training session was held for the NDU chapter in Tavush district. Over 40 party members participated in the workshop, which focused on canvassing skills, implementation of community development projects, and proposal writing. Sasha Butaev, NDU's Chair of Regional Coordination, assisted NDI in training party activists.

NDI/Armenia conducted the same training for twelve NDU regional leaders in Lori district and 25 regional coordinators in the city of Ashtarak. At the beginning of each session, NDI facilitated a discussion with the participants regarding internal party developments and how they might affect the work of the local chapter. The participants appreciated the honest dialogue and offered their opinion about the issues concerning the future of the party.

In June, NDI conducted a regional training for NDU's chapter in Gyumri (Shirak district). Sasha Butaev and 20 regional coordinators participated in the session, designed to educate regional party leaders about the importance of staying active and promoting the party between elections. Following the event, NDI met with Mr. Vahan Tumasian, NDU regional chair in Shirak district and a former participant of NDI training in the U.S., to discuss the development of multi-party regional roundtables. This program, scheduled to begin in July, would bring political parties in Shirak together to work on common issues of public concern. The roundtables would further explore opportunities to form a regional coalition among these parties dedicated to addressing problems faced by communities in the district. Mr. Tumasian worked with NDI to develop a draft agenda, press release and strategy to bring diverse political leaders together in one room.

At the end of June, NDI/Armenia met with the leaders of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to discuss recent developments in the process of creating the LDP Coalition. LDP leaders have been working with NDI to bring together six opposition parties to create a coalition with its own charter and bylaws. NDI will continue to work with the LDP's leaders to further develop programming and secure emerging partnerships.

V. EVALUATION

Civic Programming

NDI and IYC have witnessed the direct impact of these programs in communities throughout the country. IYC programming has effectively facilitated communication between citizens and local officials, and influenced local decision-making in a variety of ways. First, IYC town hall meetings continue to provide opportunities for residents to discuss community needs; build

working relationships with local officials; and overcome alienation from government decision-making process. During this quarter, an average of 70 citizens attended each town hall meeting organized by IYC, 17% more than in the last quarter.

Second, IYC citizen participation programs continue to motivate hundreds of citizens across the country to volunteer their time and donate funds to improve conditions in their communities. IYC is continuing to demonstrate that it can implement these citizen participation programs in their communities without assistance from NDI. IYC has also spread training throughout their organization so that programs across the country can be conducted and managed by organizational staff and volunteers without support and guidance from IYC leaders in Yerevan. IYC created 12 new advisory committees and recruited 123 volunteers during the past three months.

In addition, NDI and IYC continued to develop a successful democracy education program for Armenian youth. Students eagerly participated in the seminars and demonstrated a great deal of understanding and enthusiasm for the subject matter. In addition, media coverage effectively increased the audience for the seminars; local TV and radio stations broadcast some of the seminars throughout the nation. Each television broadcast was designed to stimulate discussion on electoral issues and demonstrate the value of promoting democracy among students who are near voting age. NDI believes these programs have helped increase youth participation in IYC and thus contributed to the start of a new generation of activists.

IYC's Citizen Advisory Committee conference, held in Yerevan this May, was an important forum to reflect on IYC's institutional capacity to deliver quality programming now and in the future and to allow participants to discuss common obstacles and exchange ideas and successful approaches. At the conference participants talked about the ways of developing and supporting town hall meetings and existing citizen advisory committees. IYC also emphasized to the participants the importance of the basic contact between elected official and constituents as a means of solving community problems.

NDI training has helped It's Your Choice to develop accounting systems that meets western standards and can be used to manage multiple grants. As a result, NDI and IYC were able to institute a cooperative agreement on June 1 that formalizes the funding relationship between the two organizations while offering IYC the flexibility to form additional agreements. NDI expects that by increasing IYC's financial management capacity, it has also contributed to IYC's attractiveness to foreign donors.

Party Programming

Throughout this quarter, the major political parties in Armenia have been preoccupied with internal party development. NDI had to postpone its regional party programming with the Armenian Peoples Party and the Self-Determination Union until next quarter. However, in private meetings with parties' leaders, NDI continued to stress the need to reach out to and interact with citizens and demonstrate effective techniques for doing so. NDI succeeded in establishing working relationships with new several political parties. Leaders of these new parties have expressed their interest in participating in NDI's regional trainings and asked NDI to

provide consultations and technical assistance during their development phase. Party leaders and activists in many of these new parties include participants of past NDI training.

By the end of May, NDI/Armenia had completed regional trainings for several of NDU's chapters. Participants were enthusiastic and quickly grasped the skills being taught. The training provided an opportunity to discuss issues of communication and coordination between national and regional party chapters. National party leaders assisted NDI, creating a productive and encouraging environment. The participants also appreciated the opportunity to discuss internal party issues. After the successful dialogue on this issue, NDU's Chair of Regional Coordination Sasha Butaev suggested that it be included in training for the remaining chapters.

VI. PERSONNEL

During this quarter, Nick Demeter directed the NDI/Armenia office and also continued in the capacity of political party and civic trainer. Gegham Sarkissian, NDI/Armenia's program manager and political consultant, participated in the design, implementation and management of NDI and IYC programs. All programs were developed in consultation with NDI's Washington staff.

In June, NDI hired Erica Breth as its new civic trainer in Armenia. Ms. Breth will begin work with civic groups in August 2001.

VII. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

During the next quarter, NDI will continue to provide training sessions and consultations for its political party partners in Yerevan and in regional districts. NDI will help parties to document citizen's needs and interests, and plan programs in response. In addition, NDI will assist in the development of a regional party coalition in Shirak district designed to address community issues and build cooperation among political parties. NDI also plans to conduct a comprehensive political party assessment in early fall. NDI and IYC will also continue to work closely with existing CACs to further develop their understanding of the local government process, and support their efforts in community organizing. IYC plans to conduct Armenia's first public hearing at the local level in July while exploring opportunities to conduct public hearings and other programs at the district level of government.